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Subject: True Christian Toleration.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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# TRUE CHRISTIAN TOLERATION.

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"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it, therefore? the multitudes must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing; but that thou thyself walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them."—Acts XXI. 17—26.

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On a former occasion, I spoke from this passage as illustrating the great matter of Christian liberality and liberty, as a sort of enfranchisement of conscience. It is for another purpose that I use it this morning.

This was, to all intents and purposes, a council: of course, not exactly what we call a council in our day, because there were no such churches then as we have now, in practice, or in organization even. This was, however, a body composed of the authoritative men among the Christian people of Jerusalem. The elders were all gathered together. And it will amuse you to hear what the reason was. Paul was on trial for want of orthodoxy! Dr. Dwight, whom we now bow the knee to, was very much suspected, during his life-time, of want of orthodoxy; Jonathan Edwards, whom all our theologians swear by, in his day suffered a great deal of disre-

pute, for want of orthodoxy; every man, all the way up, who has laid the church under obligation—Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, Zwinglius, and others—have suffered in their day and generation, as being disturbers, unsettling the belief of men; but it does strike us as very strange that Paul should have been arraigned on the ground of laxity of practice and uncertainty of belief, and should have been obliged to purge himself—as he was.

Christianity was not a new religion that came drifting against the wind, as one might say, right up to a battle with Judaism. It was a new revelation that gradually came up to quench the old one, and take its place; as in growth, the lower stem shoots out another, which surpasses it in organization, and gradually out of that shoots another, until we come to the blossoming top, and from that to the fruit. As there is no antagonism between the root and the branches; as the blossom is developed from the root, through the intermediate stages of growth from the lowest to the highest form; so Judaism was a root stalk. This developed as far as it could, and then, in the fullness of times, Jesus Christ came to carry it on and up. It was in the line of the Jewish faith that Christianity itself was developed.

Now, if you reflect, you will perceive that where such a state of facts takes place, there will be a great many things in the form of antecedent beliefs and institutions, which will be only relatively important, and that the weak will stick to everything, that the unreasoning will hold on to everything which has existed in the past, simply because it has been useful; but that there will be other intelligent ones who see that the new includes the old, and a good deal besides. And all such persons, while they will tolerate the old, will accept the new. They will say, "The old was right, but it was relative. It is not superseded: it is fulfilled, and is carried, in another form higher."

The blossoming of a stem does not destroy the plant, but fulfills it. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through flesh," Jesus Christ, coming, did. He did not, then, come to destroy the law, as he himself said; but to fulfill it; to give it a spiritual form; a full, final growth; a free, glorious development. And when that time comes in which men are beginning to take their first steps away from the old and fixed, and towards the new, the free and the large, there must of necessity be great division, great diversity. And here is the place where the old and new schools always set in. The old school wants to hold the old things as they were; the new school wants to hold the old things, and wants to hold them just as they ought to be. On the one hand, there are influences at work



which tend to drive the old school into a kind of superstitious adhesion—into a conservatism which has in it no growth and no respectability. On the other hand, the tendencies are to drive the new school entirely away from the old school into something different—something that shall not resemble it. But in point of fact, the old is the father of the new, and the new should always have filial relations to the old. Conservatism is the stalk out of which the progressive rises; and the progressive should always have a good stem under it to stand on when the wind blows, and its limber branches wave therein.

Paul, standing before this council, was obliged to defend himself as against the Jewish prejudices, for not believing in Moses; for not believing in Mosaic customs; for teaching a new doctrine. It was an absolute departure from the religion of the Jews. Now, he had not wholly abandoned the system of his fathers. He believed in it enough to use it when circumstances required it; but he was set free from it in its absolute form. He did not believe any longer in Judaism as the unenlightened, unchristianized Jews did. He was liberal and he was sceptical, both; but his scepticism was the scepticism of the old, regarding it as not big enough; and his liberality consisted in believing in more, not less.

There are two kinds of scepticism; one is measured by the mathematical sign of “minus,” that doubts and disbelieves, and goes back, and back; and the other is designated by the mathematical sign of “plus,” which disbelieves in old forms, because they are not large enough; because they are not fruitful enough; because they are not ripe enough. The scepticism “minus” is deteriorating; but the scepticism “plus” is ennobling. If there is to be change and growth, there must be in every generation times when men shall doubt the past in order to build larger. There must be times when men shall be free to set machinery in operation which shall do more perfectly the work of God in their day and generation.

So Paul stood before this council, suspected of irregularity because he insisted on adapting his labor, not according to the old Jewish forms, but according to the exigencies of the work he found to do, in the providence of God, in the fields where he went to preach the Gospel.

I have run over this briefly, because we had a council last week, in New York. I would not pretend to say that the council for the installation of Rev. George Hepworth, which was held last week in the Brick Church is to be compared to that council which was held in Jerusalem for clearing and purging Paul, and giving him

clean papers with which to go forth to the churches; yet I think it comes under the same head, just as a species comes under a genus, and that there is no irreverence in speaking about this New York council from the starting-point of that old council in Jerusalem over which James presided, and in which Paul was the heresiarch.

In the first place, I think it worth your while to know what a council is. Almost all ecclesiastical denominations have permanent judicatories and judicial bodies. They are called "Consistories" in the Dutch Reformed church. They are called "Presbyteries," "Synods," and "General Assemblies" in the Presbyterian church. They are permanent tribunals, and belong to the organization of these churches. In the Congregational churches, and in the Baptist churches, which are also Congregational, there are no permanent judicial bodies. Whenever the churches want, or any one of them wants light, or information on any subject, they call together, of their own will, such neighboring churches, each by its pastor and delegates, as they choose; and for the time being the council is made an advisory body; and when the church has derived from it all the light that it wants, it dissolves, and goes back to its original condition. The Congregational churches recognize that each church is itself a complete and perfected body; that it has a right to ask counsel of other neighboring bodies; but that there is no authority in any church organization over the individual and local church.

Now, a council was convened in New York, not according to the ordinary Congregational methods. It was peculiar in this respect, that it was made up of ministers from various denominations. The Episcopal church, the Methodist church, the Dutch Reformed church, the Presbyterian church, the Baptist churches, and the Congregational churches were represented. The Rev. Mr. Tyng spoke for such of his Episcopal brethren as agree with him—and that is all that anybody can do. The Rev. Bishop Foss—Mr. Foss—was present from the Methodist church, as I understand it. (I called him *Bishop*, because I thought he would have been one, and because I suppose he will be one before a great while.) The Presbyterian church, besides Professor Martin, Dr. Murray, and others, was represented by no less eminent, revered and beloved a man than Dr. McCosh, president of Princeton College. And if he, trained in Scotland, among the orthodox Presbyterians, is not a judge of orthodoxy, I do not know where you will find a man that is. The Dutch Reformed church had Dr. Ormiston present. Dr. Armitage, as I am informed, represented the Baptist churches.



The Rev. R. S. Storrs, the Rev. Dr. Budington, the Rev. Dr. Taylor of the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, and others, represented the Congregational churches.

I call your attention to the composition of this council; and I say that, as I recollect former days, such a thing as this was then totally impossible. As I recollect the state of feeling in churches during my youth, to have brought together such a council to sit in the common work of examining a man and installing him over an Apostolic charge—a council made up of Old and New School Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and members of the Dutch Reformed church—was simply out of the question.

That fact alone is one of God's hand-boards with the unmistakable finger pointing in the direction in which providence is guiding the churches and the world at the present time.

I remember very well the time when a minister's face of another denomination in the congregation was considered a fair target for any pulpit. I remember the time when we used to vindicate our accuracy by showing how inaccurate every one else was. I remember the time when theology meant war, and when we felt it our duty, not simply to be right ourselves, but to make everybody feel that he was not right unless he was as we were.

This council, by the by, sat in a place which is memorable. Where did it sit? In the old Brick Church—no, it is in the *new* Brick one; but it is the Old church in the new brick, which *once* stood near Printing House Square. It was for a hundred years the sign and symbol of orthodoxy in the Presbyterian church. It has had a very noble history. No name is more memorable in our annals than that of the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Spring, who was for half a century teacher and preacher in that church. And that church it was which threw open its doors to this miscellaneous council.

And who was the man they were going to examine? George Hepworth. And who is Mr. Hepworth? A man born of Unitarian parents, reared in the Unitarian theology, during all his early years a minister in that denomination, and late the pastor of the church of the Messiah in New York. He went from that church, by a change of experience, into a nearer alliance with what are called the "Evangelical denominations;" and his place was made good in the church of the Messiah by our friend and late neighbor of the Congregational church, the Rev. Mr. Powers, who, following his own sympathies, went over to the Unitarian faith, and is settled where Mr. Hepworth was, as pastor of the church of the Messiah. I shall not pause on those facts, which, however, are significant;

but it was this Mr. Hepworth, so born, so reared, and so bred, that came to be examined before the council made up of venerable and authoritative ministers of five or six of the great Christian denominations of the day, sitting in that august seat of orthodoxy, the Brick Church in New York.

And now, what did they do with him? Did they take him, as forty years ago, as thirty years ago, as twenty years ago they would have taken him, as a vile rag of heresy, and put him in a tub, and scrub him till there was nothing of him, or until all that was left of him was white and clean? That is what they would have done with him if he had gone before the council that I went before, when I was examined and installed. They would have put him through all the points of theology, commencing at the beginning of the Westminster Catechism, and, without omitting a particle of doctrine, going clear through to the end. But what was the action of this council, made up of such men as Dr. Ormiston and Dr. Murray—these men who are *magisters*, masters in theology—what was their action in respect to this man, who came in from the Unitarian side of Christianity, and asked to be installed, with the fellowship and consent of the orthodox evangelical churches, as the pastor, in good standing, of this church in New York? What was their examination of him? It almost entirely left out technical theology. I was not present at the examination; but I was told by those who were, that Mr. Hepworth simply made a relation of the steps by which he had so far changed his view of truth and duty, as to feel less at home with his former friends, and more attracted to and at home with his present friends; and that it was the relation of his personal experience—the development in his soul of the need of something higher than a human Saviour; the gradual dawning upon him of the faith that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and very God for him; the development in his soul, also, of a conviction of the reality of the doctrines of the Gospel in regard to the sinfulness of man, in regard to that operation of the Spirit by which men are regenerated, and in regard to the implanting of a true spiritual manhood in men by the power of the Holy Ghost—that it was this relation of personal experience on which they founded their decision:—not any dogmatic forms; not any sharp philosophic statements. On the relation of matters of his personal experience, before that council, they, with thanks, and with very great gratulation and joy, without a single exception, unanimously voted to accept Brother Hepworth, and proceeded with the installation service, which took place last Tuesday night, in the Brick Church, in the city of New York.



That was the Council ; that was the action of the Council ; that was the place ; and that was the man : now, what is the inference ?

First, I infer from this action, the growth, under divine Providence, of the principles of spiritual affinity rather than of theological repulsion. I infer, fairly, that that repugnance which has hitherto been generated by differences of external organization and external activities ; that that repugnance which belongs to the flesh, and to organizations in the flesh, is losing power ; and that the affinities which spring from like aspirations, like views, like joys, and like desires, are increasing. Only so can you account for the existence of such a council, for its action, and for its results.

The grounds on which the council accepted this candidate were not directly grounds of theology, except as all piety implies underlying theology. They accepted the fact that this man had been brought by the Spirit of God into the same state of feeling and hope that they themselves had ; and they argued just as Peter argued, and they accepted Mr. Hepworth's statement on the same grounds that the council that examined Paul accepted Peter's argument : *Since God by his Spirit gave them the same gifts that he gave us, what are we, that we should resist God ?*

Secondly, the absolute unanimity of vote in this council I regard as very significant ; because the members of it represented very widely different statements of thought ; and it is not to be supposed that a single one of them regarded himself as giving up any of his views, or theories or doctrines. Do you suppose that when Dr. McCosh voted for Mr. Hepworth, with his mild and nebulous statement, he meant to be understood as saying that he did not consider a clear, sharp-cut system of thought as very desirable ? Right over against him was the Arminian theologian ; and do you suppose that he relinquished the Arminian view of truth as he held it strongly and systematically ? By no means. But there was a way found by which every member of that council—Baptist, Congregationalist, Episcopalian, Dutch Reformed, Presbyterian, Methodist—held on to his theology, and yet voted for this man, whose theology was one which probably did not jump exactly with any of theirs. The candidate had little technical and dogmatic precision. He had, however, an experience, a practical aim, a working intention, which covered the ground of orthodoxy. It was a case like that of Peter and Cornelius. The spirit was right, and substantially the underlying thought was right. His views may have been crude and unsystematic ; but they were counted by these men as sufficient, in as much as they had in them truth, the mind and will of Christ,

and the power of usefulness. And they were willing to trust this man to the guidance of God, as he had proved himself to be under the leadings of the Divine Spirit. There is great growth in that. It is no small thing.

I should consider a council very dangerous that came together and said, "It makes no difference whether you take Calvinistic or Arminian views." I should say that such a council was weak and foolish. The only proper ground is that thinking men ought to be trained to think sharply, accurately, and distinctly. And if such men have the opportunity to do it, they ought to cohere their thinkings into a system. A creed is as natural to a man as clothes; and men ought to have creeds.

But, Thirdly, when men have got creeds, it is in their power to hold them as true, without at the same time saying that they are infallible and absolute, and that all other modes of stating the same range of truth is necessarily erroneous and dangerous.

It is this holding the truth as it is given to *you*, with fidelity to your convictions, and at the same time allowing other men to hold the truth as it is revealed to *them*—it is this which means *Christian toleration*. It is growth in the direction of the power of men to sit together—ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred men, representing four or five complex systems of philosophy or theology—and yet, to see in each other that essential spirit of love, and that power of the Holy Ghost, by which each man shall say, "I shall do my work by my method, and you may do your work by your method." The work is more than the workman; and the Spirit of God under which we are working is greater than your or my technical statement of the truth. There is a great ripening, not toward the liberalism of indifference, but toward that higher and grander liberality in which men of positive convictions and clean-cut thoughts are able to say, "Not only have I the liberty to hold my own views, but I accredit to every other man the liberty to hold his views as freely as I hold mine; and yet I call him brother." That is a spirit of brotherhood and piety which rises higher and shines brighter than any technical theories or opinions.

This council was remarkable because it was not meant to imply, and it did not imply, as I have said, indifference to theology. And no more did it imply indifference to church government, nor to the worship and rights of denominations. If men say, "Well, denominations, sects, are all going to the dust," no, they are not. Mr. Tyng gave the charge to the pastor—and it was as sweet a charge as ever fell from mortal lips—it was honey from the honeycomb; and did he, substantially, say that he considered loose Congregation-



alism as good as Episcopacy? No, he did not. If that were his feeling, why had he not gone into the Congregational Church?

When I go into my grounds, and prune my trees, I always cut from the bottom up. My theory is that the sun, striking on the cut place, cracks it, so that the rain, falling on the part thus laid open, runs under the bark, and rots it; therefore I cut up; and in that way the wound is protected. But my neighbor cuts from the top down. He says that the sun heals the wound quicker, by thickening the juices more rapidly. At the same time, we never quarreled on the subject. I think that my way is the best, and he thinks that his is the best; but we never threw a stone at each other.

Are there two men who work in the same direction, and work with the same instrumentalities? Are there two men who conduct their business alike? It is interesting to hear men of the same trade criticize each other, when they do it in a friendly spirit.

I have heard two lumbermen discuss each the way in which the other cut his logs in the woods, the method which he pursued in rafting them to the mills, and the mode in which he organized his gangs. Each had his own ideas about the best plan of procedure, and thought they were right, and argued against those of the other; they differed widely in their notions as to how the business should be carried on; and yet they were good warm friends, and were able to go along together without let or hindrance. "Live and let live," is their practical maxim.

There are no two families, probably, that make bread just alike, or that make up their beds just alike. Scarcely any two families govern their servants just alike, or proceed on precisely the same principles of economy. Some people economize in one way, and some in another. Some people are tight in the place where others are loose; and some are loose where others are tight. And so it goes. Yet neighbors manage to live together and respect each other. Not only do they contrive to prevent war in the neighborhood, but they do not feel that they have lost any conscience, or self-respect, or sincerity, when they shake hands all round, and say to each other, "Well, I suppose your way is good for you, and mine is good for me; and I am willing that you should have your way, while I claim the right to have mine." There may be superiority in some ways, and one may see that superiority, while another does not.

I do not undertake to say that when these five or six men of different denominations came together, they came to show their disgust for denominationalism. They probably went back to their

several places, saying, in regard to their own methods, "These are the ways which we like, and which we think are best; but we do not consider them indispensable; and if another denomination likes any other modes better, why should they not be allowed to use them? And why should we break friendship with them because they do not think exactly as we do?"

This council, then, did not signify that theology was of no consequence; but it did signify that it thought the Spirit of God in a man was of more importance than any particular form of theology. I think it meant that, if it did not state it. This was not a council that said, in the common, promiscuous language of the day, "All sects, all denominations of religion are to be swept away, and there is to be a great unity yet." No, not till there is a different God. God does not love unity. Where do you find a hint of that kind in nature? The vast and final perfect thing will be made up of infinite, *infinite* variations; and the road to final unity is the road to endless diversities. Differentiation every where; myriads of different beings doing the same things by different methods; one idea expressed by ten thousand different forms of organization, scattered up and down through creation—this is the divine idea as revealed to us in organization. By his providence God makes men different. And He makes different men to work differently. One works by feeling; another by imagination; another by the perceptive reason; another by the reflective reason; another by all of these combined. Different minds do things differently. All things do not strike in the same way on all these human mirrors before me. If, when I speak, I had the power of discerning your thoughts, I should see that many of you are thinking of things which I do not mean, and that many of you mean things which I do not think. And so when men say that there ought to be a great unity, that all the denominations ought to be ground up together, I say no, no, NO! I would not have them all united in one.

I think very well of elm trees; but I would not have all trees converted into elms, for the world. I think admirably well of the oak; but I should be tired if there were nothing but oaks in the world. I think supremely well of the old cedar of Lebanon; but I should be sorry to see cedars of Lebanon take the place of all other trees. No, let us have oaks, let us have elms, let us have beeches, let us have ashes, let us have all forms of blossoming trees. Let us have trees of all heights, and all methods of development. Let us have all those growths which are so beautiful to the eyes, and which are so useful withal. The hickory has no right to throw



its nuts over at the chestnut because it is not a hickory ; nor has the chestnut a right to pitch its burs at the hickory because it is not a chestnut. The persimmon has no right to make faces at the apple-tree, nor has the apple-tree a right to throw its fruit at the persimmon. The apple-tree, the peach-tree, the pear-tree, each stands on its own root, and performs its own functions in its own way. The world is a great museum of variations in unity.

Let not men, therefore, despise denominations. I glory in them. I glory in Episcopacy ; I glory in Presbyterianism ; I glory in the modified Episcopacy of the Methodist church ; I glory in the stout individualism of the Baptists ; I glory in any denomination that I see has the power in it to go out into the world and subdue it to civilization and Christianity. And because it differs from the denomination to which I belong, or because its mode of working differs from my mode, it is not to be despised.

Shall I refuse to cross the deep unless I can go in a ship that is built in all respects after the pattern which I think is best ? All yachts are not built alike. Your yacht is built after one pattern, and mine is built after another ; mine is the best, of course, although you think yours is the best ! But shall I despise your yacht because it is not like mine ? Yet people insist that in theology we shall be built exactly alike—as much alike as the Newfoundland fishermen are ; and as much in the fog, too !

It does not seem to me that any members of this council have sacrificed their theology for mine, or for any other form of theology. It does not seem to me that they have sacrificed anything which belongs to their peculiar organizations. But what have they done ? They have borne witness that there is something more important than any of these external things—namely, *the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*. They have said that a living man who has proved himself to be a Christian workman, whose whole spirit and temper have been under the divine influence through months and years, whose faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is manifest, who shows himself to have been sanctified by the Spirit of the living God, and who has power to call men from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God's glory—they have said that such a man is to be taken and fellowshipped. They have not said that he is so much right and so much wrong, but that the fact that the manhood of Christ was given him is a fact transcendent, superior, dominant.

This event is not, in any sense, to be called a victory of the new over the old. It merely shows that that divine Providence which has watched over the church, and adapted it to the several

ages in which it has existed, is now guarding it and leading it into new spheres, and to new duties. God is inspiring his church with wisdom to meet the new exigencies which are arising. The work which we have to do is not the work that was done in England during the Reformation, nor the work that was done during the Reformation on the Continent. There was a time when it was necessary that men should defend their lives and civil rights by a statement of their faith, built up as solid as the walls of a fort. Those days have passed away. Those things which were by circumstances made obligatory on men then and there, are not binding on us now and here. When, in England, in the times of Henry VIII. and of Elizabeth, a man's life was not worth a year's purchase who did not believe in the communion of the Lord's supper; when it was a civil offense, a crime punishable by the courts, not to believe so and so, and in such and such things—then, in such an exigency, the definite statement of a man's views and convictions was a matter of some importance. The age then demanded something fixed in belief; but it does not demand it now. We have passed into a new sphere; into a sphere of other questions and interests.

For example, what is our work to-day? Is it to erect such barriers between the civil and the ecclesiastical tribunals, by the formation and holding of creeds, as shall shield us? Are we attempting, as Calvin did, to break the power of a despotic church over men, and, not setting them free from belief in religion, to give them such an intellectual system as shall stand in the place of the old organized system? Are we called to such a work? Not at all. It does not belong to our day.

What is God's providence saying to us, to those across the deep, to the world over, to nations, and to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? "Go in and possess the land." What is the cry to-day, but "Civilization, Education, and knowledge of Christ?" The whole earth is calling to the church, and saying, "Send us the light of Christianity—the word of God. Teach us! teach us!" What, in our own home-land, so large, so far-reaching toward the oceans and toward the pole; what, in the wonderful development among us of immigration, both from other lands and from remote parts of our own—from the valleys and the mountain passes; what, in the midst of this population that spreads itself from shore to shore of the continent, and whose great engineering of civilization are felt every where—what here, is the call? Are we called to be sharp in matters of theology, and to make our doctrines like arrows to torment men withal? No! the call is to activity, to practical



work ; and there are a few substantial facts of belief which are sufficient for this universal activity. And God is indicating that he is bringing together the hearts of all Christians, not by leading them to give up their distinctive forms and theologies, but by placing before them a common end which is more important than any of those distinctive features—the conversion of the continent—the civilization and enlightenment of this great nation, than which none other on the globe has greater promise. There are other countries which are vaster in extent and more populous ; but what population has Russia which can be compared with this population ?

Our work, then, is evangelization ; civilization ; giving intelligence with conscience ; inspiring a holy and sanctified life ; spreading the light of truth abroad everywhere. And that we may be helped in this thing, God is letting down streams of light in every direction, which, though as they are manipulated they may for the time being seem to be antagonistic, are, I think, more beneficial than all the influences of the church have been for many generations. I mean the very great progress which is now being made by scientific investigation into the origin and nature of man ; into the theory of society ; into the questions of obligation, and sociology, and jurisprudence, and law, and humanity. These things are passing under the inquisition of science in these later days.

Let no man think that by such an inquisition we lose any thing which we ought to keep. I think we shall have more assured truth than we ever have had. We may turn out more ignorant than we have been accustomed to suppose ourselves to be. We do not know as much as we think we do ; and to find this out will be a good thing.

“I am all gold,” says the great nugget, as it comes out of the mine. “I will see what you are,” says the chemist ; and he puts it into the crucible. A part of it proves to be gold, and a part of it slag. The lump of gold is not so big by one half when it comes out as it was when it went in ; but it is pure gold that comes out, and dross that is left behind.

We are full of conceit. The developments of the ages accumulating upon us, have filled us with what we think to be knowledge and certainties. Much of it will prove to be false. But when we come out after having been put into the alembic, the little that we shall bring with us will be worth more than all that we carried in. For the truth, in its own self, is immutable, universal, absolute—not relative. A little of that truth which is true, and universal to human thought and human consciousness, is worth mountains of truth which is only relative, and which is believed to be true by men of a particular organization or conformation.

We are coming on to an age when there are to be great trials in regard to convictions of faith, and statements of orthodoxy. We are coming on to times when there are to be great trials of doctrine. But the Word of God standeth sure. When we come to that ground where we make no more pretensions for this dear old book [the Bible] than it makes for itself; when we take it and hold it just as it presents itself to us, as an epitome of the ripest experiences of men down through a long period of development; when we bring to the knowledge of our fellow men, as it has been made known to us by more scientific methods, the doctrine of the sinfulness of man—that is to say, such a condition as needs divine unfolding, and has a divine Revelator that has the power to regenerate and sanctify, and declares the doctrine of the relations of this life to the other life, in respect to God, spirit, necessity, weakness, inner want, supplication, help, transformation—when we do this, the teachings of Scripture will be summed up, I think, and will be the voice, not of the Calvinist, nor of the Arminian, nor of any sect, nor of any man outside of sects, but of God, speaking in the world, and in the consciousness of men, in the experience and knowledge of the schools, and in nature itself. Great will be the power of pure truth, and great will be the abundance of the fruit thereof.

To that day we are to contribute, Christian brethren. To that day every man contributes who lives a better life; who leaves behind him a higher notion of manhood; who makes it plain to the poor and needy that they can live better than they are living. Whoever, by domestic industry, by fortitude in suffering, by gentleness in trial, and by a benevolent self-denial which carries with it, and fortifies, and makes sweeter, any of the other Christian graces; whoever lives a noble life for Christ and God—he is one of God's workmen, working on that great building of which God is the supreme Architect.

Holy living is right thinking, first or last. Live better, and you will have fewer controversies, fewer divisions, and more of that unity which consists of the divine whole, made up of infinite parts brought into harmony. Unity is no monochord. Unity is that grand swelling symphony played on a hundred instruments, and in a score of parts, and yet so interwoven that the one great sound, made up of hundreds and thousands of minor sounds, shall be a unity of harmony.

May God so unite us, and prepare us for his work, at home, abroad, and everywhere; and may those signs and tokens which we behold encourage us to duty, to purity of life, to more power of faith, to greater hopefulness and to greater industry.



## PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

OUR Father, we would not take thy blessings and go away thankless, as men who find bread in a house uninhabited eat it, and thank no one. We desire that every mercy may suggest thee, and that every suggestion of our God may be full of rebuke for what is evil in us, and full of hope and encouragement in our struggles to overcome evil. We thank thee that we are not left to be as the clod. We thank thee that thou hast advanced us high in the chain of being, and that we are moving toward thee, to discern thee, and that that which is beyond us is beginning to dawn upon us—the sight of God; the realization of things transcendent; the belief that the eye and the senses do not contain all the truth, but that there are beyond infinite depths and things transcendent, and relations inconceivably beautiful and dear, and beings noble above every human conception, and a God who is not fate, nor power, nor despotism, but a Father in all the glow and nobleness of Fatherhood in one so transcendent above men in their weakness. We set our faces toward this great beyond. We cannot fathom it; no one returns to tell us what it is; yet we believe that it is there. We listen at evening to its far-off word, and hear only what we think we hear; yet we believe that the singers are there, and that the joy is there, and that infinite and noble occupations are there. And our hearts are drawn by something: is it not by thy Spirit, Father? We yearn: is it not thy Spirit that prays within us with yearnings unutterable? We rejoice: is it not the joy of the Holy Ghost?

Out of trouble and out of temptation we come. As the sailors from the stormy sea, into bays surrounded by land green and tranquil; so we come into houses of peace from the tumult of this world. Is it not thy guiding hand that brings us into this peace which passeth all understanding. We desire, O Lord our God, to be lifted up still more by this buoying presence by this power within; we are so helpless—we are so far away from the knowledge of things transcendent. We have no wings by which to fly to thee. We can only sit, as birds, callow and unfledged, sit upon the nest, and cry out for bread to parents that bring it. We can call out to thee; but how little can we do! We believe that the day is coming when we shall see thee as thou art; but how far are we now from being able to see thee as thou art! The day is coming when we shall stand in resolute strength; but how full of manifold weakness are we now! We believe that the day is not far distant when the whole atmosphere shall be filled with peace, and shall glow with love; but we are in the midst of selfishness, and of pride, and of avarice, and of rivalries, and of a thousand evil passions which seek to dominate, with which we make battle by conscience and hope and all fidelity, and in which battle we are helped by the constant inspirations of thy Spirit. We believe that the victory is ours. We believe that yet we shall wear the crown. We believe that thou hast been a Captain guiding us toward victory, and that our crown shall be through thy valor, and through thy wondrous love and mercy. Grant, not simply that we may be overwhelmed with joy in the life to come, but that some joy may come to us here. May something of heaven be ours upon earth. Grant that here we may have some leaf from the tree of life; some drop from the water of life; some throb from that Heart which bears with the life of the universe.

Reveal thyself in us from day to day, and lift us above the domain of low and vulgar things. Grant that we may walk as seeing Him who is invisible, and wear something of the majesty of his nature, and forget not, any day, that we are the sons of God, but remember what things befit such sonship, and what things are unbecfitting.

We pray that we may never sit down to build here as if this were the

place for firm foundations, or as if there could be a home where death is at liberty to invade on every side; where come various overwhelming disasters which prostrate all inspiring hopes; where there is no untrembling ground, and no sea that is not full of storms. May we not think of putting all that we have here, and venturing all, and forever; but may we have treasure in heaven; and there may our heart be where our treasure is.

We pray for the consolation of thy Spirit, to-day, upon all those who have been greatly tried; upon all those who have borne the burden and heat of the day. Whatever may be their trouble, and however it may deal with them in its individual application, grant that they may have this consolation, that it is not accident nor fate; that it springs not from the ground; that it comes not from the dust; and though it may be the ministration of law, and may spring from their own carelessness or sinfulness, may they believe that, nevertheless, such is the economy of thy grace that it is the Lord who guideth all things. And may they feel able to go through the things which are earnest and next to them, and to behold the Comforter, and to hear him say, "What things I know, ye know not, but ye shall know hereafter." O that we may be able to roll care, and burdens, and bereavement, and heartsickness, and hopelessness, and all manifold disappointments, into the great hereafter where God is, and where tears are not; where we shall be, and where joy shall abide upon our head forever.

We pray that thou wilt be very near to those who are watching over their sick—to parents whose children are on beds of sickness; to companions who sit by the bedside of companions; to friends who are befriending the poor and needy. May all, to-day, who lift up silent thoughts for thy succor feel that God's angels are descending around about them. Restore the sick to health, that are appointed thereto. Give those grace to see the joy of their meeting in heaven who are sent for by thee, and who are permitted to go forth from school into the light and liberty of their Father's house.

Bless those who have the burdens of life upon them. May they be more royal in their trust, and learn to cast off care. As the ship in the sea goes through, or rides over, or sheds off from its deck, the water that flows therein, so may we voyagers be able to stand the ocean and the storm, and make our port at last.

We beseech of thee, O Lord our God, that thou wilt bless all those who desire our prayers. All those un murmuring hearts who know not how to frame their vague thoughts into petitions—help them. Help all those who are helping the helpless. Give courage and strength to all those who are making themselves fathers and mothers to orphan children. Give great grace to those apostles who have been ordained by love to go out and seek little children who have none to teach them, and who are teaching them in our schools and Bible classes. Be with those who seek to guide the young over the snares of life, and to open for them the doors of opportunity. May they never be sorry for what they have done; and may they never be proud of that little which they have accomplished. In the face of Him who gave his life for them, what are the hours that they give for their fellows?

We pray that thou wilt bless all thy people in their church associations and civic relations. May thy churches learn more and more the blessing of union and love. And we pray that that peace which belongs to the heart of God may be breathed more and more upon them. May the clangor and trumpet, and the tramp of armed men, and the groans of the wounded, cease; and may the sound of the sweet silver trumpet of the Gospel be heard; and may the joy above be mingled with the joy below, as we unite in praising the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*



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